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ABSTRACT

Conflict between home and work roles has been well documented. Although a variety of correlates of home-career conflict have been studied, the research literature presents a set of interrelationships which need further clarification. A study was conducted to test hypothesized relationships between home-career conflict and the variables of career commitment, commitment to family roles, number of roles, marital status, parental status, spouse support, attitudes toward women, and family configuration. Subjects were male (N=7) and female (N=67) clerical, managerial, and professional employees of a large health insurance company. Subjects were primarily young married women who had young children at home. Questionnaires assessing demographic variables, number of respondent roles, commitment to career and home roles, spouse support, attitudes toward women, family configuration, and home-career conflict were completed by subjects. The results indicated that respondents who experienced less home-career conflict were high in subjective estimates of career commitment. Home-career conflict increased with greater commitment to the parent role, but not to the spouse role. Subjects who were married, parents, and involved in multiple roles had higher levels of home-career conflict than those who were not married, not parents, and involved in fewer roles. Family configuration had a major impact on home-career conflict, while the impacts of spouse support and of feminist views were insignificant. (NB)

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Home-Career Conflict: An Exploration of the Delicate Balance

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Abstract

Conflict between home and work roles has been well documented. Although a variety of correlates of home-career conflict have been studied, the research literature presents a set of interrelationships which need further clarification. The purpose of this study was to test hypothesized relationships between home-career conflict and the following variables: career commitment, commitment to family roles, number of roles, marital status, parental status, spouse support, attitudes toward women, and family configuration. Seven of the 9 hypotheses were strongly supported, further clarifying the nature of the conflict. Implications for employees and future research were discussed.

Home-Career Conflict: An Exploration of the Delicate Balance

Both men and women who are members of the labor force continually deal with the conflicting demands of their multiple social roles. Kahn, Wolf, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) define role conflict as "the simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" (p. 19). Conflict between home and work roles is well documented in the literature and is a major obstacle to career advancement, a significant stressor, and an important aspect of current and future occupations (Catalyst, 1981; Cooper, 1981; Davidson & Cooper, 1983; Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980; General Mills, 1981; Gilbert, Holahan, & Manning, 1981; Gordon & Hall, 1974; Peterson-Hardt & Burlin, 1979; Terborg, 1977).

A wide variety of correlates of home-career conflict have been studied. These include characteristics such as gender, parental, marital, and occupational status, as well as situational factors such as spouse support, self esteem, and career commitment. However, as suggested by Richardson (1981), the accumulation of empirical studies has not been integrated in a way which advances understanding of the interrelationship of variables associated with home-career conflict. In addition, a review of the literature on home-career conflict indicates several areas which have received notable attention, but the need for further replication and clarification of these relationships is also evident. These studies of home-career conflict, grouped according to important variables and potential influences upon this topic, are presented as follows.

Commitment to career and family roles. Holahan and Gilbert (1979a) examined the effect of being strongly committed to the career role on home-career conflict and found that higher career commitment was associated with lower role conflict. Their findings suggest a testable hypothesis, that higher levels of

career commitment are associated with less home-career conflict. Although similar research regarding commitment to family roles does not exist, it would seem reasonable to explore whether commitment to family roles is associated with home-career conflict.

Role overload and role strain. Role overload, one form of home-career conflict (Kahn et al., 1964), is thought to be a function of the number of roles in which an individual is involved. Studies by Hermann and Gyllstrom (1977) and Hall (1975) indicate significant relationships between number of roles and role conflict. In addition, recent research on role strain among working mothers (Anderson-Kulman & Paludi, 1986) suggests that strain is related to increased family conflict and low job satisfaction. Therefore, a testable hypothesis appears. Specifically, it is suggested that home-career conflict increases with greater numbers of roles.

Marital and family roles. Marital and parental roles appear to be those most relevant to home-career conflict, and studies by Hermann and Gyllstrom (1977) and Holahan and Gilbert (1979a) indicate that subjects who are married, and those with children, perceived significantly more conflict between work and home. Based on these studies, it is hypothesized that home-career conflict is greater for married than unmarried workers and greater for parents than nonparents.

Spouse support. The empirical research also suggests that spouse support plays a critical role in decreasing home-career conflict. In two studies, Holahan and Gilbert (1979a, 1979b) found that home-career conflict was significantly influenced and lessened by spouse support. These findings suggest the hypothesis that home-career conflict decreases with greater spouse support.

Profeminist attitudes. It has also been suggested (Stake, 1979; Terborg, 1977) that more conservative and traditional attitudes about women are probably associated with higher home-career conflict. A substantial amount of empirical evidence does suggest that profeminist attitudes are related to lower home-

career role conflict (Gaddy et al., 1983; Hall & Gordon, 1974; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979a; Stake, 1979). Therefore, it is hypothesized that perceived profeminist attitudes of workers will likely be associated with lower perceived levels of home-career conflict.

Family life stage. The concept of family life stage involves consideration of ages and number of children as well as number of adults with or without child care responsibilities. Although it has been suggested that family life stage may be an important influence on home-career conflict (Cooper, 1981; Waite, 1980), little empirical research exists. Cook and Rousseau (1984) found that home-career conflict increases with greater numbers of children. Thus, it appears that family configuration, numbers of adults as well as numbers and ages of children in a household, may influence home-career conflict. More specifically, the literature suggests that home-career conflict increases with greater numbers of children, with increase in children's ages, and with greater variability in children's ages.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to replicate various findings in the literature regarding the correlates of home-career conflict. Specifically, the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis (1) Higher levels of career commitment, as well as higher levels of organizational commitment, are associated with less home-career conflict;

Hypothesis (2) Commitment to family roles is related to home-career conflict;

Hypothesis (3) Home-career conflict increases with greater numbers of roles;

Hypothesis (4) Home-career conflict is greater for married than unmarried workers;

Hypothesis (5) Home-career conflict is greater for parents than non-parents;

Hypothesis (6) Home-career conflict decreases with greater spouse support;

Hypothesis (7) Profeminist attitudes towards working women leads to lower home-career conflict;

Hypothesis (8) Home-career conflict increases with greater numbers of children, with increase in children's ages, and with greater variability in children's ages;

Hypothesis (9) Home-career conflict is related to family configuration.

Method

Subjects

Eighty-three full time employees of a large health insurance company volunteered to participate in a questionnaire study focused upon interactions between worker and home roles. Seventy-four (N = 74) of the 83 volunteers or 89% completed the questionnaire. These 74 individuals were the subjects of this study.

Subjects ranged in age from 20 to 49 years (M = 33.09 years SD = 6.73), were predominately female (N = 67 or 91% of the sample), and were well educated (N = 28 or 38% of subjects were high school graduates; N = 38 or 51% had completed education beyond high school). Most subjects were currently married (N = 52 or 71% of subjects), and many were parents (N = 43 or 58% of subjects). For subjects who had children, the mean number was one with a range of from zero to five, and their ages ranged from less than a year to 25 years with a mean age of 5.5 years. In addition, for the entire subject group, a variety of life style/family configurations was reported with most subjects (N = 34 or 46%) indicating that they were part of a two-adult family with child care

responsibilities.

Subjects in clerical, managerial service, and professional occupations were all represented in the sample, with the highest portion of participants being clerical workers (N = 23 or 31%) or professional employees (N = 21 or 28%). The length of time the subjects had worked for their current employer ranged from one to 20 years with a mean of 6.5 years. The majority of the group were in the earlier stages of career/job experience as sixty-two percent of subjects had worked for more than two but less than 10 years in their current occupation across all places of employment. In addition, all subjects indicated involvement in multiple roles, most subjects indicated involvement in an average of 3.4 roles out of a possible 7 roles, and indicated that career role was most important followed by spouse and parent roles.

To summarize, the subjects were primarily younger women who were married, and many were parents of younger children. They were involved in several roles other than that of worker, and they indicated that career role was of prime importance to them. Thus, the sample seemed an appropriate one to assess potential home-career conflict relationships.

Procedure

All full-time employees of a major (1100 employee) health insurance company, whose work force is approximately 73% female, were asked to volunteer for participation in a questionnaire study focused upon interactions between worker and home roles. In a letter, composed by the investigators and circulated by the personnel department, employees were recruited for the study and were assured of anonymity in their responses. They were informed that the company would not have access to their responses. Eighty-three employees volunteered to participate and 74 of these individuals (89% of the original volunteers) actually completed a detailed 98-item questionnaire. Data collection occurred on company premises during work hours at six scheduled summer noon "Lunch 'n' Learn" sessions.

Measures

The 98-item questionnaire booklet completed by employees consisted of the following variables and measures.

Demographic Information. Subjects were asked to provide information pertinent to marital status, parental status, age, gender, and number and ages of children.

Number of roles. Subjects indicated from a list of seven possible roles (spouse, parent, full time paid worker, part time paid worker, volunteer worker, homemaker, other) those roles in which they currently participated.

Commitment to career and home roles. The subject's level of investment and commitment to various roles was measured in terms of subjective estimates of the importance of each of three roles: pursuing a career, being a spouse, and being a parent. Subjects rated the proportionate importance of parent, spouse, and career roles by distributing 100 points between the three roles.

In addition, a 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) was included as part of the questionnaire booklet and was intended to measure commitment to the subject's current employer. The OCQ includes items designed to assess acceptance of organizational goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. The scale includes questions such as "I find that my values and the organization's are very similar." Responses are made on a seven-point scale anchored at extremes by strongly agree (1) and strongly disagree (7). Results of the 15 items were summed and divided by 15 to obtain a final summary organizational commitment score. Several items are worded negatively and reverse-scored to decrease response bias.

The instrument appears to be psychometrically sound. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) have done a number of analyses with it in a wide variety of jobs.

Estimates of internal consistency using coefficient alpha have been consistently high, ranging from .82 to .93. Correlations between each item and total scores resulted in a median correlation of .64. Item homogeneity has also been examined by performing factor analysis of the OCQ. Single-factor solutions have resulted and have supported the conclusion that items are measuring a single common construct. Test-retest reliability estimates have varied from r = .53 to r = .75 over periods ranging from two to four months. Mowday et al. (1982) also report five sources of validity evidence for the OCQ which moderately support the instrument's convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. In this study the coefficient alpha for the OCQ was .95. This finding suggests a high internal consistency for the OCQ in this sample.

Spouse support. Subjects rated on a 7-point scale, anchored at 1-no support to 7-full support, how much emotional support their spouse or partner provided separately with respect to both career and home and family. These two measures were adopted from studies by Holahan and Gilbert (1979 a,b).

Attitudes towards women. In order to assess attitudes towards working women and women managers, subjects completed the 21-item Women as Managers Scale (WAM) developed by Peters, Terborg, and Taynor (1974) by responding on a 7-point scale anchored by 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree. The 21-item WAM scale included such items as "On the average, a woman who stays home all the time with her children is a better mother than a woman who works outside the home at least half time."

The scale developed by Peters et al. (1974) includes only items from an initial pool which consistently differentiated among persons holding significantly different attitudes, did not consistently elicit different responses depending on the direction of the item stem, had a factor loading of .40 on factors selected from a principal components analysis, and distinctly loaded on a single factor in the principal components analysis. A corrected split-half reliability of .91 was reported (Peters et al., 1974). Validity

data reported found WAM scores to be correlated .42 to .54 with a question about attitudes towards the women's rights movement (Peters et al., 1974). Profeminist attitudes are reflected by higher WAM scores. In this study a coefficient alpha of .79 was found for the WAM. This finding suggests that the WAM possesses reasonable internal reliability in this sample.

Family configuration. Subjects were asked to indicate which of four family living arrangements best described their current family (one vs. two adults in combination with child care vs. no child care).

Home-career conflict. In order to assess degree of home-career conflict, subjects completed a 22-item, six-scale measure developed by Holahan and Gilbert (1979a, 1979b). Items were responded to on a 7-point scale anchored at 1-causes no internal conflict to 7-causes high internal conflict. The six scales developed by Holahan and Gilbert (1979a, b) were used to measure role conflict between pairs of the four major life roles of Professional, Spouse, Parent, and Self as a Self-Actualized Person. Each of the six scales measures possible conflict between a pair of the four roles. The scales are: Professional vs. Spouse, Professional vs. Parent, Professional vs. Self, Spouse vs. Self, Spouse vs. Parent, and Parent vs. Self. A representative item for a scale includes (Professional vs. Spouse Scale) "Wanting to be a good spouse vs. being unwilling to risk taking time from your work." Summary scores for each of the scales was obtained by summing the items relevant to each scale to arrive at six scores, and a total home-career conflict scale for all 22 items was calculated by summing the six scale scores.

Cronbach's alphas for each of the separate six scales, as reported by Holahan and Gilbert (1979a) range from .75 to .88. In this study, the total home-career conflict scale coefficient alpha reliability was calculated to be .95. This finding suggests a high degree of consistency among items.

Results

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations, sample sizes, and potential range of values for all of the variables of this study.

Insert Table 1 about here

Pearson Product Moment Correlational analyses were used to explore the hypothesized relationships between total home-career conflict scores and the other variables. These correlations are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The results of the correlational analyses are presented with respect to each of the previous stated hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. A significant inverse relationship between total home-career conflict score and subjective estimates of career commitment ($r = -.48$, $p < .0001$) was found. This correlation provides strong support for the hypothesis that employees high in subjective estimates of career commitment experience less home-career conflict. However, a non-significant relationship ($r = -.08$, $p < .52$) was obtained between total home-career conflict and the OCQ, a measure of commitment to a particular organization. Exploration of separate relationships between organizational commitment (OCQ) and the six specific home-career conflict subscales did not reveal any significant relationships.

Hypothesis 2. A significant correlation was found between home-career conflict and commitment to the parent role ($r = .52$, $p < .0001$), but not commitment to the spouse role, indicating mixed support for the hypothesis that home-career conflict increases with commitment to family roles.

Hypothesis 3. The correlational analyses also indicated strong support for the hypothesis that home-career conflict increases with greater numbers of roles ($r = .60$, $p < .0001$).

Hypothesis 4. A significant relationship was also found between home-career conflict and marital status ($r = -.28$, $p < .02$). In addition, a t test indicated that home-career conflict was greater for married than unmarried subjects, $t(1,72) = 23.39$, $p < .0001$.

Hypothesis 5. The correlation between parental status and home-career conflict was also strong and significant ($r = -.73$, $p < .0001$). Additional analysis via a t test indicates support for the hypothesis that parents have significantly greater home-career conflict than nonparents, $t(1,72) = 81.60$, $p < .0001$.

Hypothesis 6. The hypothesized inverse relationship between spouse support and home-career conflict was not supported. No significant correlation was found between total home-career conflict score and separate ratings of spouse support with career or with home and family.

Hypothesis 7. No significant relationship was found between subjects' WAM scores and home-career conflict score. These findings did not support the hypothesis that profeminist attitudes were associated with decreased home-career conflict.

Hypothesis 8. Children were found to strongly influence home-career conflict. The correlational analyses indicated a high degree of relationship between home-career conflict and number of children ($r = .52$, $p < .0001$), mean age of subject's children ($r = .30$, $p < .008$), and range of ages of subject's children ($r = .25$, $p < .03$). Thus, these results suggest that as predicted, home-career conflict increases with greater numbers of children, increasing ages of children, and greater variability in the ages of children in the family.

Hypothesis 9. The subject's family configuraation was strongly related to total home-career conflict scores ($r = .68$, $p < .001$). Linear regression analysis of variance further indicated a significant effect of family configuration on home-career conflict, $F(3,70) = 32.18$, $p < .0001$. Post hoc analyses using the LSD test indicated that all four groups differed significantly, with home-career conflict increasing from lowest to highest in the following order: one adult with no child care; two adults with no child care; one adult with child care; two adults with child care.

Discussion

Variables Related to Home-Career Conflict. In this study the relationships between home-career conflict and a number of variables previously discussed in the literature were clarified. The results indicate support for 7 of the hypotheses and no support for two of the hypotheses.

To summarize, home-career conflict was found to be lower when subjective global estimates of career commitment were high. However, no significant relationship was found between a summary measure of home-career conflict and a focused measure, the OCQ, of commitment to the subject's present employer. Even though the subjects in this study had, on average, a reasonably long job tenure for persons in the earlier phases of career/job experience, specific employer commitment, as measured by the OCQ, and career commitment as subjectively estimated did not significantly correlate. The global measure and the specific measure of commitment apparently assess different aspects of the concept of commitment, and only one of these measures, the global subjective estimate, relates to home-career conflict.

Home-career conflict increased with greater commitment to the parent role, but not with increased commitment to the spouse role. Subjects who were married, parents, and involved in multiple roles, had higher levels of home-career conflict than those who were not married or parents, and those with

fewer roles. Home-career conflict was not diminished with greater spouse support as hypothesized. Similarly, the study did not find evidence that more prefeminist attitudes decreased conflict. Family configuration had a major impact on home-career conflict. Specifically, greater numbers of children, older children, greater variability in children's ages, and families with two adults with child care responsibilities were associated with higher levels of home-carer conflict. Table 3 is presented to more clearly delineate the variables associated with high and low home-career conflict.

Insert Table 3 about here

Limitations of the Study

Measurement issues which limit interpretation of the study's results should be carefully noted. First, the sample size was relatively small and was comprised primarily of young working women. Therefore, conclusions must be drawn with caution. However, frequent large and significant correlations were found even with a small sample. The results suggest that the relationships examined are likely to be fairly strong.

Generalizability of these findings may be limited to organizations similar to that in which the study was conducted, such as insurance or health services companies which employ large numbers of female employees. However, although the sample was fairly homogeneous with respect to gender, education, and marital status, it was relatively more diverse in terms of subject age, parental status, family configuration, job classification, years of employment, and income. This diversity enhances the generalizability of findings.

However, self selection for participation in the study also potentially limits generalizability of the results. Subjects were involved on a voluntary basis. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that subjects with greater interest

in a study described as examining "interactions between your role as a worker and your home commitments" may be those with greater concerns about home-career conflict. It is equally plausible that the sample may have been biased toward subjects who, because of less role overload or current workload, had the time to volunteer for participation in the study.

Implications of the Study

Because past research has depicted a complex set of associations between home-career conflict and numerous variables, the present research has been valuable in replicating some of these relationships and partially clarifying the correlative aspect of home-career conflict. The results of this study also have implications for employees. First of all, it is clear from the findings that subjects who are married, have children (particularly older children or children that vary widely in age), have many roles, and/or are in families with two adults are most likely to experience home-career conflict. It appears critical to determine what the additive effects are of these variables and what combinations or degree of these variables minimize and maximize home-career conflict.

Similarly, it may be helpful to distinguish differences within sets of variables associated with home-career conflict (e.g., what types of marriages are most prone to home-career conflict?). In addition, identification and exploration of clusters of life style and role variables which may augment coping style, or provide maximum social support and minimize home-career conflict, are promising and useful directions for future research.

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Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Sample Sizes for Variables

Variable	M	SD	N[a]	Number of items	Potential range of values
Age	33.09	6.73	70	1	-
Mean age of children	5.54	7.05	74	1	-
Number of children	1.16	1.28	74	1	-
Range age of children	1.63	2.91	74	1	-
Number of months with organization	89.62	64.17	74	1	-
Number of roles	3.45	1.41	74	1	-
Importance of career role	35.74	26.46	74	1	1-100
Importance of spouse role	32.80	20.74	74	1	1-100
Importance of parent role	31.45	22.48	74	1	1-100
Rating of spouse support with work	5.56	1.48	61	1	1-7
Rating of spouse support with home and family	4.83	1.65	59	1	1-7
Perceived organizational support of home and family	7.10	3.07	74	2	2-14
Total women as managers score (WAM)	133.05	11.00	74	21	21-147
Total organizational commitment scores (OCQ)	76.66	18.85	74	15	15-105
Total home-career conflict scale scores	60.12	29.92	74	23	23-161
Professional vs. Self scale scores	13.80	6.03	73	4	4-28
Professional vs. Parent scale scores	16.88	6.21	43	4	4-28
Spouse vs. Parent Scale scores	10.95	5.29	38	3	3-21
Spouse vs. Self Scale scores	9.72	4.82	64	4	4-28
Parent vs. Self Scale scores	11.77	4.29	43	3	3-21
Professional vs. Spouse scale scores	10.71	5.71	65	4	4-28

[a] Total N = 74, not all subjects responded to all items.

Table 2

Correlations Between Home-Career Conflict Total Scores and All Variables

Variable	r	p	N
Career Commitment	-.48	.0001	74
Organizational Commitment (OCQ)	-.08	.52	74
Commitment to Parent Role	.52	.0001	74
Commitment to Spouse	.05	.70	74
Number of Roles	.60	.0001	74
Marital Status[a]	-.28	.02	74
Parental Status[b]	-.73	.0001	74
Gender[c]	-.12	.33	73
Spouse Support with Home	-.18	.17	59
Spouse Support with Work	-.17	.20	61
Attitudes towards Women (WAM)	.05	.65	74
Number of Children	.52	.0001	74
Mean Age of Children	.30	.008	74
Range of Children's Ages	.25	.03	74
Family Configuration	.68	.0001	74

[a] married = 1; not married = 2

[b] parent = 1; non parent = 2

[c] male = 1; female = 2

Table 3

Variables Influencing Home-Career Conflict

Associated with increased home-career conflict	Associated with decreased home-career conflict
Low career commitment	High career commitment
High commitment to the parent role	Low commitment to the parent role
Large numbers of roles	Fewer numbers of roles
Being married	Being married
Having children	Not having children
Several children	Fewer children
Older children	Younger children
Children far apart in age	Children close together in age
Families with two adults with child care	Families with only one adult with no child care